

GUEST COLUMN

Official 10th Year of the Women's Food Alliance Southeast

By Leigh Cort

I invited my “dream team” to dinner in August 2013 and presented a new concept to all of the professional hospitality women who I believed would best represent the newly organized Women's Food Alliance. Caterers, a wedding planner, restaurateurs, a celebrity food journalist, one restaurant franchise marketing director and a hospitality magazine publisher. Their diversity became the centerpiece of our organization's mission — to bring together all of the career-women whose businesses revolved around food, events, travel and the growing power of females in the hospitality industry.

That night, at Ocean 60 in Atlantic Beach, the seeds were planted, and an invitation was sent to 100 hospitality-related women in Northeast Florida to

attend our first official gathering on Sept. 10, 2013, at the historic Casa Marina Hotel — the Women's Food Alliance Martini Gala of the newly established “sorority” of qualified women. Everyone who attended met the leadership team and heard the story about its inception and vision for the coming year. The evening was a huge success and our WFA had 60 members going into our second month!

We set the tone and template of the Women's Food Alliance with five events that year:

1. Chocolate Tempering and Tasting at Peterbrooke Chocolatier
2. Italian Dinner at Amici Restaurant featuring “Artichokes Made Easy”
3. Bed and Breakfast gathering and a focus group sampling Charleston's Calie's Biscuits



Contributed photo

Becky Lowry, Tammy Poudrier, Sherry Stoppelbein, Mariela Groshell, Benedetta Dubetz, Leigh Cort, Donna Harden, Belinda Hulin Crissman and Jennifer Price.

4. Restaurant Marketing Boot Camp at Woody's BBQ with a rib-eating dinner contest

5. Holiday Meatloaf Cooking Competition and Holiday Cheer

Today nearly 10 years to the day, the Women's Food Alliance has expanded to Coastal Georgia up to and past Savannah. Each month the themes and venues change — always including surprises — with the growth of exciting new

women who bring their own distinctive businesses and style into the organization. We embrace entrepreneurs, new and seasoned members in hospitality throughout the Southeast, inviting them to enjoy being part of an organization that cheers, supports, networks, partners, lends a hand and always remembers “friendship first.”

For more information, go to womensfoodalliance.com.

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(detail) John Frederick Kensett (American, 1816–72), *Singing Beach & Eagle Rock, Magnolia, Massachusetts, 1864*, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Thomas H. and Diane DeMell Jacobsen Ph.D. Foundation.



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Fifty vendors took part at the market's first event since its return. It will be held on the first Saturday of each month moving forward.

Market

Continued from 5

family atmosphere is what we've established here.”

One of the market's rules is that everything a vendor brings to sell must be homemade or hand-created, which Olsson believes is not only what residents are looking for at such a market, but it is something they can rely on.

Vendor items at the market are part of a wide range that includes everything from artwork to soaps and food.

Although the move created some time away from the public, the location change is something Olsson believes will work

out better for the Community Market in the future.

One of the biggest differences is that the market now takes place on a grass field instead of a paved parking lot.

“It makes a huge difference, especially when the sun is beating down on that pavement,” Olsson said. “It's just a better scenario for everyone involved.”

The Community Market had 50 vendors for its first Saturday event since its return, which according to Olsson is a great number to build upon.

“There's definite room to grow with the current situation,” Olsson said. “Markets like this are such staples of a community. I can only imagine what this will all be like.”